

Working Together for the Heartland

Situation Analysis:

EPA Region 7 Office of Public Affairs team has proven that a compact group of dedicated professionals can make a big impact in Media and Community Engagement, Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, FOIA, and Children's Health. Thanks to a clear vision and core values that promote Talent, Technology and Tolerance of new ideas, *R7 Office of Public Affairs* launched a BRAVE, creative, and technology-enabled program reinvention that produced positive results across all its complex program areas. The team is driven by its vision to be a learning organization that focuses on customer service to the programs and the public. With the vision and values needed for success, the team worked to reinvent internal operations in a way that would improve public awareness by focusing the critical skills and talents on the high interest issues, while ensuring the daily operations continued to become more efficient and to excel.

Most notably *R7 Office of Public Affairs* worked closely with Headquarters and the programs in launching two key proposed national rules and managing public affairs for one of the most significant public interest Superfund sites in the Nation.

R7 Office of Public Affairs has implemented a Heartland-culturally relevant integrated campaign model that resulted in saturation news coverage on EPA's critical clean water and clean air messages. These efforts successfully were integrated with R7 Divisions including Air and Waste Management Division; Water, Wetlands and Pesticides Division; Superfund Division; Enforcement Coordination Office; and the Regional Administrator's Office. The campaign efforts reached millions of Heartlanders in urban and rural media markets through both earned media (pitched stories and placements) and through a Public Service Announcement campaign. The topics have received some of their highest visibility yet in the Heartland. These successes were purposeful, strategic and resulted from established objectives.

The results we've generated in operations range from FOIA (one of the fastest response rates in EPA) to Digital Communication (strategic actions have nearly doubled the number of Likes on R7's Facebook page in the past five months). What's more, the communication results have been noted by R7 leadership, by the public, by congressional members, and by EPA Headquarters' senior leadership.

Process Improvement Challenge/Opportunity:

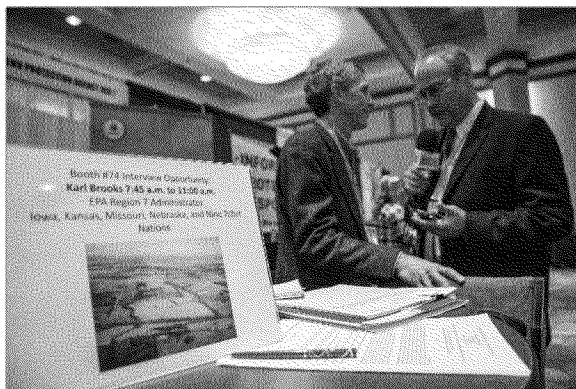
R7 Office of Public Affairs has reinvented itself in this past year. What was once an office with 24 people, is now a focused organization with 12 professionals who are empowered to daily ask what they can do to improve processes in a way that makes the operations more efficient in order to produce needed results. The office has taken on formal LEAN process improvement initiatives in FOIA and Community Engagement, and has begun its own process improvements in media interview management and review and concurrence procedures. The latest data available indicates some of these process

improvement efforts will result in efficiency improvements of more than 65%. *R7 Office of Public Affairs* is determined to close the gap in efficiencies through exploration of innovative technologies that allow the staff to focus on delivering the messages to key audiences. Digital Communications

including social media is now a unique unit within the office that provides services and partners with press officers and coordinators for children's health, healthy schools, environmental education, and program managers and staff.

Planning:

Target Audience. *R7 Office of Public Affairs* campaigns focus on "Heartlanders" who have a wide range of interests, education, financial status, etc. The core cultural values are a love of country, a desire for independence, and primarily a deep abiding love for family. Among this group include EJ communities, Agribusiness, farmers and the rural set, highly



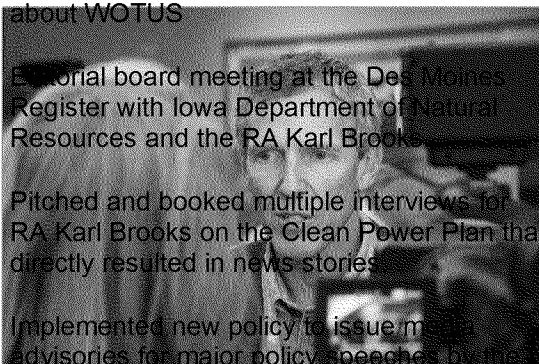
influential community leaders at all levels and the Urban set.

Execution:

Media Relations. *R7 Office of Public Affairs* leveraged skilled, trained and prepared spokespeople, resulting in significant, targeted media coverage in agriculture focused media, as well as urban and rural newspapers, radio stations and television stations. The news results have been exceptional with significant proactive placement of EPA's top messages on key issues ranging from Waters of the U.S., the Clean Power Plan and the highly sensitive and controversial West Lake Landfill Superfund Site in Bridgeton, Missouri. A sample of the specific results include:

- Wrote and placed 30 WOTUS Op-Eds, a dozen Letters to the Editor, and successfully pitched dozens of WOTUS stories. These efforts resulted in extensive news coverage in some of the toughest media markets for EPA including with Iowa Public Television, St. Joseph News Press and many others.
- Dozens of proactively pitched interviews that resulted in interviews and placed stories on many EPA topics ranging from recycling to asthma.
- Editorial Board at St. Louis Post Dispatch for RA Karl Brooks regarding the West Lake Landfill Superfund Site that resulted in a positive editorial
- Television Newscasts and Talk Shows
- Radio Newscasts and Talk Shows
- Dozens of proactive stories in Agriculture focused and other media outlets, e.g., farm broadcasters and agricultural journalists.
- Television Talk Show with RA Karl Brooks and officials from Missouri Farm Bureau about WOTUS

- Editorial board meeting at the Des Moines Register with Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the RA Karl Brooks
- Pitched and booked multiple interviews for RA Karl Brooks on the Clean Power Plan that directly resulted in news stories
- Implemented new policy to issue media advisories for major policy speeches by the RA Karl Brooks. These advisories are returning news stories in more than 50% of the cases, which is significant for policy speech advisories.



- Managed, with Headquarters, a series of WOTUS focused events in Missouri and Kansas with EPA Administrator. One media outlet termed the ambitious trip a "Barnstorming tour of the Midwest". Events included a farm tour in Missouri with scores of news reporters and a Kansas Ag Business Council luncheon keynote.

Digital Activation: Increased *R7 Office of Public Affairs'* focus on Digital Communication. Leveraged all social media accounts including Twitter, Facebook, the national YouTube Channel and other online tools such as Scribd.

- Hosted one-hour Twitter Chat with Children's Mercy Hospital to answer parent and caregiver questions about children's environmental health.
- Increased number of "Likes" on R7 Facebook page by nearly 100% through more effective use of photos, an increased number of connections with partner organizations and most importantly a campaign focus on major issues that affect and interest the Heartland.

Community Engagement. In addition to developing news coverage, *R7 Office of Public Affairs* worked extensively to engage the community, congressional members/staff and local and state government officials on the difficult environmental issues facing the Heartland with a strong emphasis on children's health, especially among EJ communities. Efforts included:

- Created multiple engagement opportunities with Congressional members/staff on key issues such as the West Lake Landfill Superfund Site. Coordinated in-person meetings and briefings, and conference calls with members of Congress and staff for RA Karl Brooks.
- For the Clean Power Plan campaign *R7 Office of Public Affairs* worked with the Air Division and Identified key audiences with key venues for RA Karl Brooks to deliver keynote speeches. The office successfully pitched and orchestrated speeches at 18 events to state government, private sector and non-profit groups to name a few.
- Worked extensively with the Mayor of Bridgeton and his parks staff to conduct a news conference at City Hall that included an equipment display by Superfund.
- Asthma Awareness Month event at Boys & Girls Club – Wagner Unit. Working with

Children's Mercy Hospital partners we screened almost 50 children for asthma. RA Karl Brooks presented an asthma lesson to kids.

- Worked closely with Brody Middle School teachers and staff to design and participate in a Clean Water Event with Karl Brooks. The event was such a success that *R7 Office of Public Affairs* saw an immediate spike in people who Like our Facebook page. There was also extensive news coverage across the state thanks to a pitched news story to a regional news network.
- Held two Twitter Chats for Children's Health Month with our partners at Children's Mercy Hospital.
- WOTUS Roundtables. Conceptualized, pitched and arranged roundtable discussions with RA Karl Brooks and key agriculture leaders in Iowa and other parts of the region. These roundtables were a critical part of our objective to engage in honest discussions with the community about this momentous proposed rule.



Individuals Nominated
Curtis Carey
*Mary Peterson
Strategic Communications Team
Kathleen Fenton
Kris Lancaster
*Sarah Hatch
Operations Team
LaTonya Sanders
Emily Albano
Ben Washburn
David Bryan
Chris Whitely
Digital Communications Team
Shannon Bond
Toni Castro
Martin Kessler
Cecilia Quirarte-Ortiz

*Worked in R7 OPA during the award period but no longer in the office.